



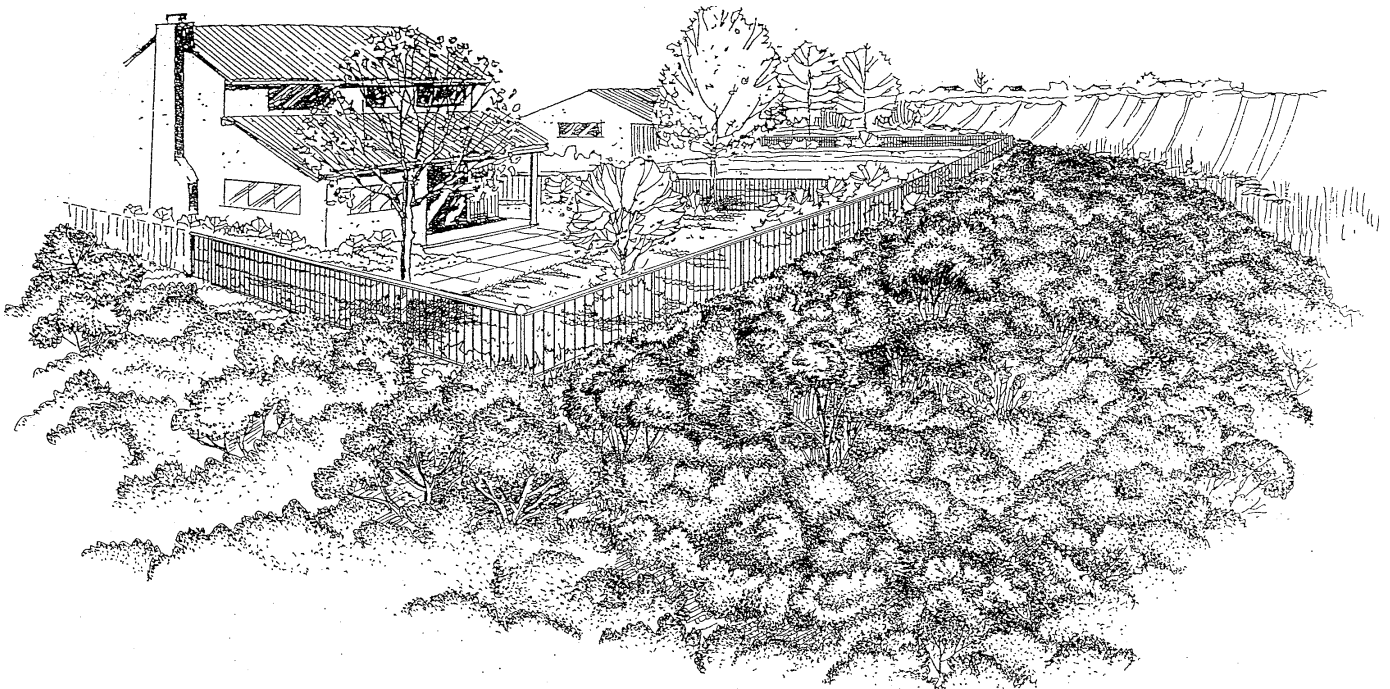
A CITY OF SAN DIEGO GUIDE TO

# CANYON FIRE SAFETY

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- ✓ **Making Your Property Safe**
- ✓ **The Right Way To Do It**

This publication is designed to provide property owners with a guide to protect their property and structures from canyon fires while complying with regulations protecting important, environmentally-sensitive lands.



**Turn the page to learn how the property above  
could be turned into a fire-safe property.**

**- BEFORE -**

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This is a City of San Diego publication produced by:

**Fire and Life Safety Services**

In Cooperation with:

**Development Services**

**Environmental Services**

**Neighborhood Code Compliance**

## Regulations that may Apply to Canyon Properties

While it would be simple if property owners could go out behind their homes and create the defensible space described on the next page, it's not that easy. If you can check off any of the items on the following list, there may be legal steps you must take before clearing the canyon property adjacent to your structure, even though you own the property. Please investigate further if any of the following may apply to your property:

1. If it is **in the Coastal Zone** (generally west of I-5, but check if you're not sure).
2. If **the slope is 25 percent** (4:1 or greater, about half as steep as normal stairs).
3. If the property is in **an open space easement**. (An existing fence-line may be one indicator that an open space easement exists. In addition, you may be prohibited from moving the fence).
4. If a **development permit** applies to the property (if a permit for development of or changes to the property was required to go to a public hearing).
5. If you need to create part of the defensible space on **land owned by the city**.
6. If the property is **adjacent to the mapped Multiple Species Conservation Program area, different guidelines apply. Contact Development and Permit Information** at 619 446-5000 for further information.

**WARNING: If any of the above conditions apply, permits may be required to create the defensible space.** Failure to obtain the required permits will render you in violation of local, state and federal environmental laws. The City of San Diego stands ready to assist with these permits to help you make your property as safe as it can be in a legal manner. Please call Development Services, Development and Permit Information at 619 446-5000 if you need help or advice on any of these permitting issues.

### ABOUT PLANT REMOVAL AND EROSION

Great care should be taken when clearing and thinning vegetation to avoid disturbing root systems and other practices that may lead to erosion. City regulations require property owners to prevent erosion and to keep sediment from leaving their property.

**ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION ARE LISTED ON THE BACK PAGE.**

## Clearing, Thinning and Pruning: Critical Steps for Fire Safety

Trees and large shrubs often create a canopy that allows fire to quickly spread and threaten nearby structures. A key purpose of clearing, thinning, and pruning is to reduce the potential for fire spread.

**Clearing or thinning** is the cutting down of plants to reduce flammable material and increase the distance between groups of plants so flames are less able to travel. Plants may be cut to a height of six inches. Roots systems should not be disturbed.

**Pruning** is the removal of branches and dead or dying wood to reduce the amount of flammable material. Trees and large shrubs must be pruned so 40% of the flammable material is removed. The lowest branches should be three times higher than the height of the vegetation below, or six feet, whichever is higher. Dead and excessive twiggy growth must also be trimmed and removed.



*Above: An unpruned shrub.*

*Below: A shrub pruned to remove 40 percent of flammable fuel*



## Some Basic Rules to Remember:

### 1. No Grubbing

The destruction of native vegetation by removing or disturbing the root system by any means, including chemical, is usually prohibited on slopes and in environmentally sensitive areas.

### 2. Remove Trimmings or Make Mulch

Debris and trimmings must be removed from the site or converted into mulch by a chipping machine and evenly dispersed to a maximum depth of six inches.

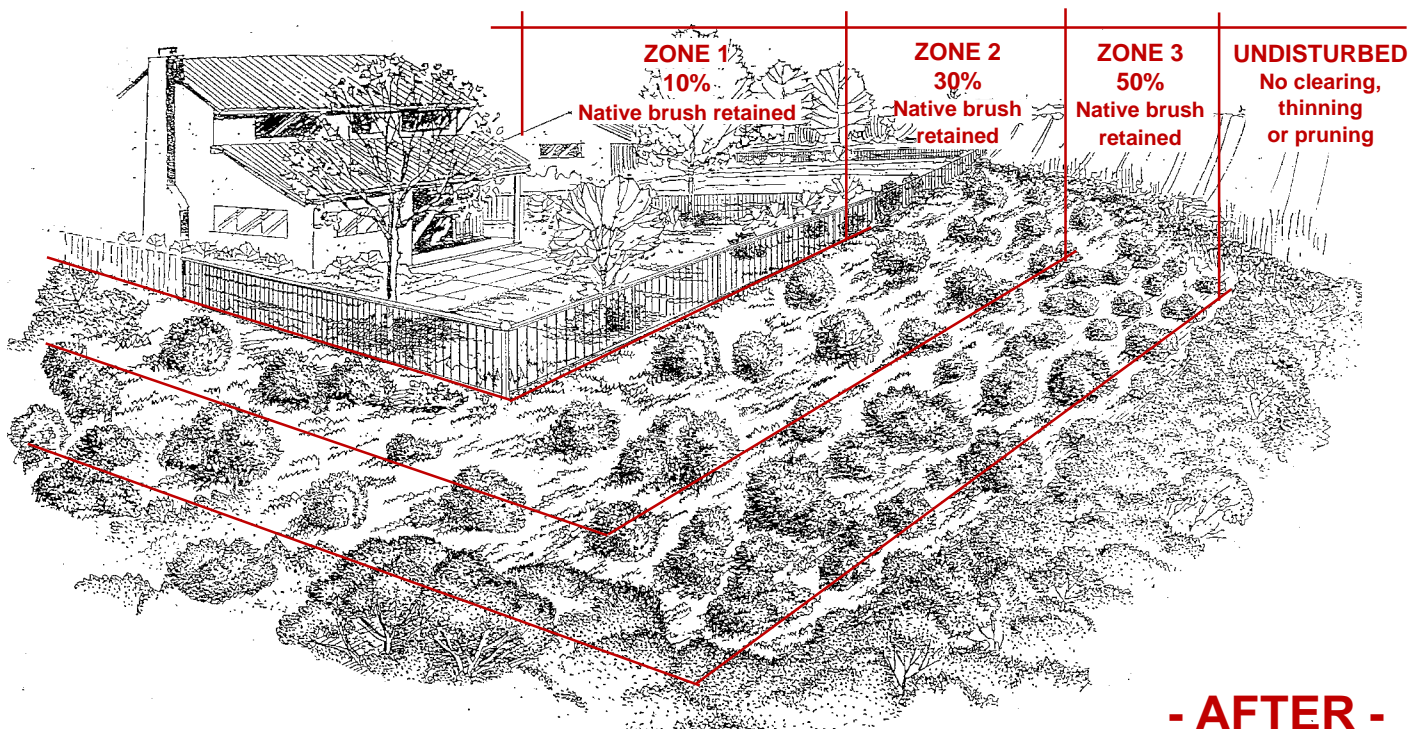
# Keeping Your Property Safe From Fire By **CREATING THE DEFENSIBLE SPACE (FIRE BREAK)**

As the drawing below demonstrates, property owners should **Create A Defensible Space** between unmaintained canyon vegetation and any structures. **Creating this Fire Break** is critical to safeguarding structures from wildfires. If your home or business adjoins a canyon, the guidelines on this page should be followed. However, the defensible space must be created in a legal manner. If any of the conditions listed on the preceding page exist on your property, there may be regulations you must follow before creating the defensible space.

## Understanding the Zone System

The defensible space is made up of three zones. The total width of these three zones is between 85 and 110 feet, depending on location. The following chart provides general guidelines about the size of the zones along the coast and inland.

MAXIMUM ZONE WIDTHS		
	West of I-5	East of I-5
<b>ZONE 1</b>	35'	40'
<b>ZONE 2</b>	30'	40'
<b>ZONE 3</b>	20'	30'
<b>TOTAL</b>	85'	110'



**ZONE 1.** Plants adjacent to structures should consist of irrigated, ornamental species. This vegetation should be kept in a well-watered condition and cleared of dead material. In this zone, no more than 10 percent of the native, non-irrigated vegetation should be retained. Requires year-round maintenance.

**ZONE 2.** Work in this area should consist of selective thinning and pruning of native plants or the introduction of low-growing, fire-retardant shrubs and ground covers. Average height of any new plants required for revegetation should be less than 24 inches. In this zone, no more than 30 percent of the native, non-irrigated vegetation should be retained. Requires inspection and periodic maintenance.

**ZONE 3.** This area is the first defense for fire safety. It involves the selective thinning and pruning of native vegetation that preserves the natural appearance of the area while reducing the amount of burnable vegetation. In this zone, no more than an average of 50 percent of the native, non-irrigated vegetation should be retained. Requires inspection and periodic maintenance.



# A FIRE SAFETY CHECKOFF LIST

The Things You Need to Do . . .

## Roof

- ☐ Remove dead or overhanging branches.
- ☐ Remove any branches within 10 feet of chimney vent.
- ☐ Clean all dead leaves and needles from roof and gutters.
- ☐ Install a roof that meets the fire resistance classification of Class C or better.
- ☐ Cover chimney outlet with a nonflammable screen of 1/2 inch or smaller mesh.

## Landscape

- ☐ On steep slopes trim flammable vegetation a safe distance from structures.
- ☐ The canopies of large trees should not form a continuous planting mass.
- ☐ Choose ornamental landscaping plants that are fire resistant and non-invasive.
- ☐ Maintain all plants by regularly removing dead branches, leaves and needles.

## Yard

- ☐ Stack woodpiles at least 30 feet from all structures, fences, and other combustible material.
- ☐ Remove all stacks of construction materials, pine needles, leaves, and other debris.
- ☐ Keep lawn chairs, umbrellas, and other canvas furniture (that might be easily ignited from sparks) a safe distance from structures.
- ☐ Clear all vegetation and other combustible or flammable materials from beneath deck area.
- ☐ Enclose underside of elevated decks with fire resistant materials.
- ☐ Refrain from dumping lawn and brush clippings in canyons.
- ☐ Structures (such as fences) in Zone 1 must be made of noncombustible or one-hour, fire-rated materials.

## Access

- ☐ Identify at least two exit routes from your neighborhood.
- ☐ Make sure that street names and house numbers are clearly visible.

## Fire Escape Plan

- ☐ Designate an emergency meeting place outside your neighborhood.
- ☐ Immediately evacuate the area when ordered by police or fire personnel.

## SOURCES OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

1. For brush management and weed abatement questions:  
**City Fire and Life Safety Services**      **619 533-4444**
2. To determine if your property has an open space easement; check your deed, title search, or final subdivision map.  
Deeds and title searches can be found at:  
**County Recorder's Office**      **619 237-0502**  
Final subdivision maps can be reviewed at:  
**City Maps and Records**      **619 446-5200**
3. For a permit to clear private property with open space easements or other legal restrictions or to learn about requirements for maintaining open space easements:  
**City Development and Permit Information**      **619 446-5000**
4. To obtain a permit to clear property on park land or other city-owned open space:  
**City Park and Recreation**      **619 235-5259**
5. To dispose of brush or other refuse:  
**City Miramar Landfill**      **858 573-1420**
6. For information on code compliance issues:  
**City Neighborhood Code Compliance**      **619 236-5500**
7. For a copy of the *Environmentally Sensitive Slope Erosion Control Guide* (no charge):  
**City Fire and Life Safety Services**      **619 533-4444**
8. For a copy of the *Environmentally Sensitive Brush Management Guide* (no charge):  
**City Fire and Life Safety Services**      **619 533-4444**



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This information will be made available in alternative formats upon request.